Investigating Spelling Errors Made by Iraqi EFL University Learners

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الخلاصة

تناولت هذه الدراسة الأخطاء الإملائية لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية / كلية التربية الأساسية / جامعة بابل. تم جمع البيانات من عينات مكتوبة من ٣٥ طالبًا متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (ذكور وإناث). وتم إعطاء الطلاب ٤٥ دقيقة لكتابة انشاء من ١٥٠ كلمة حول العراق. تم تحليل الأخطاء الإملائية الموجودة في عينات كتابة الطلاب وتصنيفها إلى أربع فئات من الأخطاء وفقًا لتصنيف (١٩٩٩) Cook : الحذف ، الاستبدال ، الادراج ، والتحويل. و تم اضافة فئة خامسة خاصة بالكلمات غير المعروفة.

الكلمات الدالة: الأخطاء الإملائية ، الحذف ، الاستبدال ، الإدراج ، التحويل ، كلمات غير معروفة

Abstract

This study dealt with the spelling errors of Iraqi EFL learners in the Dept. of English / College of Basic Education/ University of Babylon. Data were collected from written samples of ٣٥ EFL students (male and female).Students were given ٤٥ minutes to write a composition of ١٥٠ words about Iraq. The spelling errors found in the students' writing samples were analyzed and classified into four categories of errors according to Cook's Classification (١٩٩٩): omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition. A fifth category was added for the unrecognizable words.

Keywords: Spelling errors, omission, substitution, insertion, transposition, unrecognizable words

١،١ The Problem

Among the grammatical errors made by writers, spelling error occupies the most prominent position, no matter in the writers of native speakers or language learners (Leacock et al., ٢٠٠٢,١٥-١٧).It has been noted that many English language learners, including Arab students, have difficulties with English spelling (Al-zuoud, K. M., &Kabilan, ٢٠١٣,١٦٥). These difficulties have been attributed to a number of causes, such as the differences in the orthographic system between Arabic and English, and first language (L١)interference. Moreover, these spelling difficulties cause many spelling errors which negatively affect the writing proficiency of Arab students (Saiegh-Haddad, ٢٠٠٤,٨٩).This poor spelling problem hinders students in many ways. Smedley (١٩٨٣) believes that spelling errors negatively affect the clarity of the written message, and consequently interferes with communication between the writer and the reader.

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As other learners of English, Iraqi learners are anticipated to have many hinders during learning English. These hinders push them to do different types of linguistic, semantic, syntactic, and phonological errors. In Iraqi, English is learned as a foreign language (EFL), i.e. students are expected to control the four language skills i.e. (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) . As an important component of writing, spelling poses a major challenge to most beginner learners of English, resulting in misspelled words and incoherent sentences (Hyland,٢٠٠٣).

١،٢ Purposes of the Study

This study intents to :

١- Giving a brief explanation of the English spelling system.

٢- Conducting a diagnostic test to identify and classify the spelling errors made by a random sample of Iraqi EFL learners in Dept. of English / College of Basic Education during the academic year (٢٠١٨-٢٠١٩).

٣-Analysing the students' errors depending on the test results.

٢. The English Spelling System

Spelling is a linguistic unit of language referring to writing skill. It is defined as the act of forming words correctly from individual letter(Rao, ٢٠١٨,٥). Spelling has its rules to form words in a correct way in which letters should appear in proper sequence to be meaningful. English spelling is without doubt a difficult case in which many associated skills such as reading and writing are involved. It is not only difficult for the second and foreign language learners but also the native speakers find it hard.

English spelling is probably the most irregular of all alphabetic systems. Most modern languages with a few exceptions, such as Chinese and Japanese adopt the alphabetical principle for their writing systems. This means that a letter or letter combination stands for a particular sound. In certain languages such as Finnish, Spanish and Italian, we can usually predict the pronunciation of a word from seeing the spelling as well as predict the spelling of a word from hearing it pronounced. It means those languages have one to one correspondence with phonemes and letters unlike in English. We cannot guess English spelling from pronunciation or we cannot always predict pronunciation from spelling. Because English has many different ways of representing the same sound such as a sound can be represented by a letter or different letters or some letter combinations and the same letter or letter combination as well can represent more than one sound. The reasons for this irregularity are complex and

largely historical. The English alphabet comprises ٢٦ letters including ٢٤ separate consonant phonemes and ١٤ to ٢٠ vowels, depending on various dialects, which proves that there cannot be a correspondence between letters or graphemes and sounds (Kareema, ٢٠١٥,٢).

Many words in English vocabulary come from a variety of languages including Old English, Ancient Greek, Latin, and French, among others. Because of this, English words like physics, pneumonia, and pizza aren't spelled the way they are pronounced. English is also famous for silent letters. Some English words with silent letters include knight, right, gnaw and night. Often the way we "say" a word is different from how the word is spelled when it is written. It is common when speaking not to pronounce every sound in some words. For example, the word recognize may be pronounced "recogniz" or library may be pronounced "libery." However, when written these words must be spelled correctly"(Murray ,٢٠١٦,٠١). Another cause of spelling errors in English is homonyms: words that are pronounced the same but have different meanings and spellings. Some examples are principle/principal, write/right, know/no, accept/except. The same problem often occurs with words that are not "exact" homonyms, but are similar in sound. For example: except/expect, suppose/supposed, formerly/formally. The problem of spelling can be compounded for people whose first language is not English. Words in English may be similar to words of Spanish, French, Italian, or German, but the rules of spelling are often different (ibid).

٣,١ Methodology

Language testing represents a measured concentration on language and knowledge (Davies , ١٩٩٩,٠٩). Testing in language provides a balance between the practical and technical aspects of language testing that is neither too complex nor too simple (Bachman, ١٩٩٠,٢٠).

The purpose of this research paper is to identify and classify the spelling errors of Iraqi EFL learners in the Dept. of English, College of Basic Education .

In order to identify and classify the spelling errors, ٣٥students of ٣rdstage of the Dept. of English were told to write a composition of ١٥٠ words about Iraq. They wrote about the mentioned topic for ٤٥ minutes in class.

Students were informed that their identity would remain unknown. All the compositions were analyzed.

٦ composition papers were neglected, because they were useless for the aim of the study because they were found blank or having only few words. Thus, ٢٩ suitable composition papers were analyzed.

٣,٢ Mistakes Versus Errors

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In learning any subject in general and language in particular , learners make mistakes . The errors can be recorded , classified and analyzed . The studies focusing on language learners` errors pored the way for creating and establishing a new branch of linguistic investigation called error analysis (Brown,٢٠٠٠,٢١٧). Among the scholars investigating the erroneous responses of language learners was (Corder ,١٩٧٣) who was the first to make a distinction between an error and a mistake (ibid).

Errors are indicators of an imperfect knowledge of the language to be internalized . Mistakes are committed because of the influence of conditions under which communication occurs while errors depict the EFL learners inability to communicate with native speakers as they do under ideal circumstances where no violation of code takes place (Corder,١٩٧٣,٢٥٦).

Furthermore , (Corder, ١٩٧٤,٣٠) remarks that the purpose of error analysis is discovering the degree to which the learner expresses his messages by means of the categories and rules that the native speaker of the target language uses.

(Falk,١٩٧٣,٣٦١), on the other hand , considers the area of error analysis as one of the chief contributions of linguistics to the field of foreign language learning . This study focused on the errors that students produce and haven't the ability to correct them by themselves, due to they need to the competence to do that. Thus, it was necessary to use a consistent method to differentiate errors from mistakes and exclude all mistakes from the analysis. Thus, any misspelled word was located, the student's writing was examined to see if it was regularly misspelled. If yes, it was considered as an error. Yet, if the spelling of the word was correct elsewhere, the misspelling was considered as a mistake and neglected.

٣,٣ Error Analysis Steps
To recognize the spelling errors, the researcher checked all pieces of writing for three times and he marked the misspelled words with a red check to recognize them.

٣,٤ Errors Categories
Errors were categorized depending on Cook's Classification (١٩٩٩) into omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition .A fifth one was found for unrecognizable words. The following is an illustration of each type.

١- Omission, includes errors were resulted from omitting one letter or more, as deleting the letter (e)in teach(tach).

٢- Substitution, has errors were resulted from changing a letter or more with other one, as changing the letter(a)by the letter (o) in because (becouse).

٣- Insertion ,refers to adding more letter(s) to a word, as putting a final (e) to south (southe).

٤- Transposition, refers to disarranging letters in a word, like the word two is written as (tow).

٥- Unrecognizable, has words that were unreadable, such as (speasily) It was not uncounted as a type of the errors.

٣,٥ Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher assorted errors depending on Cook's classification of spelling errors (١٩٩٩) (omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition). Additionally, the researcher wrote down the total number of wrong words and their frequency of error.

٤,١ Results and Discussion

This research paper intended to investigate the spelling errors problem among Iraqi EFL learners. In order to get a clear idea about the severity of this spelling problem, table (١) showed the frequency of spelling errors in students' compositions .

Grade	Wrong words	Error frequency
٣rd stage	٢٦٤	١٦,٤٧

(Table ١) Number of wrong words and frequency of errors

Table ١ explained that the spelling errors frequency in students' writings was about ١ error nearly in each١٧ words.

Table ٢ below summarized the findings of the numbers and percentages of the recognized spelling errors listed depending on their types (Appendix A has a sample list of the recognized errors arranged depending on their type).

Grade	Omission	Substitution	Insertion	Transposition	Unrecognizable	Total no. of errors analyzed
٣rd stage	٨٢ (٣١,٠٦٪)	٦٧ (٢٥,٣٧٪)	٤٣ (١٦,٢٦٪)	٣٢ (١٢,١٢٪)	٤٠ (١٥,١٥٪)	٢٦٤

(Table ٢) Spelling errors numbers and percentages according to type

From table ٢, it is noticed that spelling errors were high in omission errors (٨٢).Its percentage was ٣١,٠٦٪. Substitution errors also had a significant part of the errors (٦٧)with a percentage of ٢٥,٣٧٪.

Concerning the other types of errors, insertion errors came third (٤٣) and its percentage was ١٦،٢٦٪. Unrecognizable words were fourth (٤٠) with a percentage ١٥،١٥٪. Transposition errors came last (٣٢) with ١٢،١٢٪ as its percentage.

٤،٢ Sources of Errors

Errors reflect the learns' inability to write correctly. They can be a strategy when learning a second (or foreign) language and evidence of the state of the learner`s knowledge and how language is learned or acquired (Corder ,١٩٧٣،٢٩٣).

According to (Al Jayousi:١٩٩٤،٤٨) the students' errors were analyzed and assigned to one of four reasons. The following is a brief illustration of the four reasons with chosen examples from the students' compositions.

- Irregularity   in   English, includes errors resulted by the non-phonetic English. Examples are:
  - Deleting of silent letters (peopl for people).

  - Words are written depending on their pronunciation (lays for lies).

  - Wrong vowel graphemes (islamec for islamic).

  - Disarranging vowel graphemes (bueatifall for beautiful).

- Mother Tongue Interference, contains the errors which appeared from the difference between the writing and sound systems of Arabic and English. Examples are:
  - Replacing the sounds that Arabic does not have, Like /v/ and /p/ with the nearest counterparts that are in Arabic (perhabs for perhaps, and cofers for covers).
  - Deleting of short vowels (vist for visit).

- Limited knowledge of spelling rules and the exceptions are found in spelling rules, includes the wrong spelled words because students don't know how to apply some of the English basic spelling rules. Examples are:
  - Producing the plural for words end with y (citys for cities).
  - Doubling the last consonant in words that end with a CVC combination of letters (fater for fatter).
  - General spelling rules that are used to many words and have a limited number of exceptions. Like the word city is written as cty, due to the students' lack of information that the grapheme c is pronounced as /s/ when the graphemes i, e, and y come after it.
- Performance, includes the spelling errors result from students fatigue.

٥. Conclusion

This paper checked the four types of spelling errors made in English writing by Iraqi EFL learners in the Dept. of English / College of Basic Education, University of Babylon. It also aimed at presenting the sources of these errors.

The current study stated that the most frequently occurring errors were errors of omission (٣١,٠٦٪.). The second most frequent errors were the errors of substitution(٢٥,٣٧٪.). Insertion errors were the third commonest type of errors(١٦,٢٦٪). Unrecognizable words and transpositions errors came fourth((١٥,١٥٪).) and fifth(١٢,١٢٪)successively.

This study assigned spelling errors to four reasons, which are irregularity of English, mother tongue interference, lack of knowledge of rules and their exceptions, and performance errors.

Finally, learners of English have to understand that there exists no perfect correspondence between the sounds (pronunciation) and letters (spelling) in English. Letter or letter combination can represent more than one sound as English spelling system is irregular and more complex. Therefore, it needs special attention.

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Appendix A

Errors categorized according to type (sample list)

Unrecognizable Words	Transposition	Insertion	Substitution	Omission
Beautiful x٣	mountian (mountain) x٢	Country x٣ (country)	repulic (republic)x٢	diffrent (different) x٢
viraty (variety)x٤	city(city) x٣	Islamiec (Islamic)x٢	Muslams (Muslims) x٢	peopl (people) x٤
humanless (humanity)	famuos (famous) x٢	weast (west)	ferthermore (furthermore) x٣	wather (weather)
lys (lies) x٣	becaues (because) x٢	frome(from) x٢	plood (blood)	betwen (between) x٢
shirn (shrine)		alive (live)	lucture (lecture)x٢	countine (continue)
		meany (many)x٢	pest (best)	courty (country) x٣
			distroy (destroy)x٣	captal

				(capital) x^2
			enamy (enemy)	beautful (beautiful)
				nort (north)